

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

NASSAU COUNTY LEGISLATURE

NORMA GONSALVES,
Presiding Officer

VETERANS AND SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DONALD MACKENZIE, Chairman

1550 Franklin Avenue
Mineola, New York

Monday, June 29, 2015
3:32 P.M

1

2 A P P E A R A N C E S :3 DONALD MACKENZIE ,
4 Chairman5 ROSE MARIE WALKER ,
6 Vice Chairwoman

7 DENNIS DUNNE

8 VINCENT MUSCARELLA

9 CARRIE SOLAGES ,
10 Ranking

11 DELIA DERIGGI-WHITTON

12

13 LAURA CURRAN

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

INDEX

BRIAN HALL, Human Services.....5

Veterans Service Agency Presentationf

RALPH ESPOSITO7

LARRY MANSFIELD8

BILL BURNS.....10

KENNY ROMMEL.....21

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: At this time
3 I will call the Veterans and Senior Affairs
4 Committee to Order. I will act as clerk and
5 take the roll. Donald MacKenzie, Chairman,
6 Present. Rose Marie Walker?

7 LEGISLATOR WALKER: Here.

8 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Dennis
9 Dunne?

10 LEGISLATOR DUNNE: Here.

11 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Carrie
12 Solages?

13 LEGISLATOR SOLAGES: Here.

14 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Delia
15 DeRiggi?

16 LEGISLATOR DERIGGI-WHITTON:
17 Here.

18 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Laura Curran?

19 LEGISLATOR CURRAN: Here.

20 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: We have a
21 quorum. We have one item on the agenda
22 today. It's Clerk Item Number 247-15, an
23 ordinance supplemental to the annual
24 appropriation ordinance in connection with
25 the Department of Human Services.

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 May I have a motion?

3 LEGISLATOR BECKER: So moved.

4 LEGISLATOR WALKER: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Moved by
6 Dennis Becker, seconded by Rose Walker. Is
7 there anyone from the administration to
8 discuss this item?

9 MR. HALL: Yes. Brian Hall from
10 Human Services. This is an appropriation
11 for mental health services for adults. It's
12 a veterans P to P counseling and it's 100
13 percent funded by the New York State
14 Department of Mental Health.

15 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Are there
16 any questions? I have one question.

17 I see in the backup that it has
18 to be closed out on or before June 30th of
19 2016. Is there any consideration given to
20 making this funding permanent or can you
21 address that issue?

22 MR. HALL: We submit plans every
23 year and the various subcontractors submit
24 plans to the state and they reward us our
25 funds accordingly. So, the people who are

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 involved with dealing with the state, they
3 would have a better answer. At this point,
4 we only have the funding through the period
5 covered.

6 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Would it be
7 your intention to continue to request the
8 funding?

9 MR. HALL: Yes, it would.

10 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Is there any
11 other public comment or questions?

12 (No verbal response.)

13 There being none, all those in
14 favor of the item please indicate aye.

15 (Aye.)

16 Any opposed?

17 (No verbal response.)

18 That passes unanimously.

19 Thank you, sir.

20 Now we also have before us today
21 several people from the Veterans Service
22 Agency. We have Director, Ralph Esposito;
23 Deputy Director, Ajat Castillo; Kenny
24 Rommel; Larry Mansfield; Bill Burns; and
25 Cylinthia Burgess to give us a presentation

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 and educate both the legislators and the
3 public on what the agency does.

4 So, without further comment by
5 me, Mr. Esposito, please.

6 MR. ESPOSITO: Good afternoon
7 everyone. I just want to say thank you to
8 you all on behalf of the veterans of the
9 county, the 85,000 veterans, always
10 supporting our group.

11 Nassau County does some job with
12 our veterans. I want to thank you all.
13 It's all through your efforts, our County
14 Executive and everyone else who takes part
15 in helping veterans.

16 These are people that have done
17 so much for our country and deserve the best
18 which we give them. Now, when they come to
19 us, we have our counselors, which I would
20 like to introduce to you. I would like to
21 have our head counselor, Kenny Rommel, who
22 is number one; actually, it's Larry
23 Mansfield who is number one, Kenny is number
24 two. Bill Burns, and our newest, Cylinthia
25 Burgess is our newest added on counselor,

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 top shelf, my deputy, Scott Casio.

3 Now, we would like to do a small
4 presentation to you to show you what we do.
5 We know how hard it is for you to come to
6 see us, so we are coming to see you. Larry.

7 MR. MANSFIELD: Thank you. It's
8 a pleasure to be here. We welcome this
9 opportunity. We have a very small agency as
10 you can see, and what we do bring is a lot
11 of good benefits to our veterans and their
12 families.

13 There is different types of
14 claims that we handle. We handle service
15 connected and non-service connected
16 disability claims. Service connected, we
17 all know if a veteran was injured in service
18 and he has an injury or illness that we will
19 file a disability claim for them. We submit
20 through the American Legion as our primary
21 go to agency. We are all accredited by the
22 American Legion. We have cross
23 representation with VFW and Veterans of the
24 Vietnam War and we can service veterans that
25 have claims that have previously been

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 submitted by those agencies.

3 We see approximately 100 sit down
4 counselings every week. We have four
5 counselors now so we are seeing at least 20
6 a day. That doesn't count all the phone
7 calls and the information that we give out
8 over the phone or follow ups on disability
9 claims.

10 The non service connected
11 disability pension is one that probably
12 takes up about 60 percent of our volumes in
13 dollars and time. The non service connected
14 disability pension is for those veterans who
15 are over 65 and have been -- who are now in
16 need of long term care at home or in an
17 assisted living facility. It's a non
18 service connected disability pension for
19 wartime veterans.

20 I'm going to show initially a
21 video before Brian Williams stubbed his toe,
22 but, if the information is good, and this ad
23 on TV, February 2007, when we do our
24 outreach to different groups, and we have
25 spoken to over 1,200 individuals in the

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 first six months of this year going to
3 different retirement groups, different
4 senior centers and so forth, and we show
5 this video first, because when we do the
6 Power Point presentation, our seniors are
7 schooled in saying, if it's too good to be
8 true, it ain't true.

9 So, I found this video and then I
10 had to defend it with Power Point of course.
11 So I found the video and then they believe
12 Brian Williams and I wasn't interrupted
13 during the Power Point, and it still serves
14 its purpose to get the information out.
15 Bill?

16 MR. BURNS: Understand this
17 presentation is to senior groups mostly, so
18 it's not for caregivers appear so forth.
19 It's just to give the general public an idea
20 of what they may be entitled to and then to
21 seek our assistance in completing their
22 forms for them.

23 Nobody is ever refused to be seen
24 by us. You may get a complaint that they
25 wouldn't see me, or they turned me down.

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 The only reason someone would be turned down
3 is if they are not qualified. Okay? So, we
4 will see everyone. No one is turned away.

5 As you can see it's a public
6 service that we are performing to get the
7 information out to our veterans.

8 These are some sayings from our
9 political leaders and our leaders in the
10 military. We have what our mission
11 statement is. It is to locate all veterans
12 and their families where we may find them
13 and inform them of the availability and
14 qualification for VA benefits. And assist
15 however legally possible a service officer
16 in qualifying claimants, and with health
17 care partners at assisted living facilities
18 with our Medicaid people at DSS, and for
19 home care facilities.

20 Of course there is military
21 qualifications. Must not have a
22 dishonorable discharge. 90 days of active
23 duty. One day during a declared period of
24 war time. They did not have to be in
25 combat. This is an a non-service connected

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 disability pension as I mentioned earlier.
3 You must be disabled or over the age of 65.
4 You do not have to be helpless to qualify
5 for this benefit.

6 Generally it's a medical opinion
7 that you are unable to perform at least two
8 activities of daily living and need
9 assistance or you may have a cognitive
10 impairment. The war time periods: World
11 War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, '61 to
12 '75. On Vietnam '61 to '64 you would have
13 had to be in the country of Vietnam in
14 service. '64 to '75 is Vietnam era and they
15 are covered under this as well as the Gulf
16 War.

17 There are nearly two million
18 veterans or their surviving spouses that may
19 be eligible that are not collecting benefits
20 and they are missing out as much as \$22
21 billion a year in benefits that is federal
22 money.

23 The VA has limited success in
24 finding them unless they are enrolled in the
25 VA healthcare system or they may be located

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 through real estate filings.

3 About one in seven widows are
4 even aware that the benefits exist. So,
5 again, the VA is unaware who they are and
6 it's difficult to locate them. So, when we
7 do outreach, I started doing this about
8 eight years ago before I started working for
9 the county, and I probably spoke to every
10 assisted living facility on Long Island.
11 They didn't even ask that question upon
12 intake, and now every single one of them
13 does.

14 So, if you are a wartime veteran
15 or widow or at least age 65, you are either
16 qualify today or in the future. So, it's
17 important if you have family members, if you
18 know an aunt or an uncle or neighbor, let
19 them know about this benefit. Believe it or
20 not, it's still hard to get the word out.

21 So, learn what's necessary to
22 apply. When I ask them would, financial
23 assistance be a blessing to help you,
24 financial, more money always helps and makes
25 better decisions.

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 A single veteran is eligible for
3 \$22,000 a year. A widow \$13,500 a year. A
4 veteran and spouse, over \$25,000 a year.
5 And, by the way, it is federal money and it
6 is tax free just as service connected
7 disability is as well.

8 I use this analogy, could you use
9 a million dollars? Well, we all could. I
10 cannot give you the million dollars, but if
11 you had it and earned three percent, it
12 would earn \$31,200 a year. After taxes
13 would leave you about I think \$23,400 which
14 is what the benefit was for the husband and
15 wife, a disabled veteran. So, it's a very
16 valuable benefit.

17 I can't give you the million
18 bucks, but I can give you the proceeds of
19 the interest. If you have over \$80,000 in
20 assets, liquid cash assets, then you need to
21 speak with a qualified counselor. As it
22 said in the video, it's a need based program
23 and you might need to reposition some
24 assets.

25 There's also critical medical

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 information that has to be completed by
3 their family doctor that states that they
4 need that assistance.

5 Why is time of the essence?

6 Well, claims we were quoting a year ago,
7 takes about 12 to 14 months to get approval.
8 We had many veterans and spouses dying on
9 claim. That has changed considerably
10 recently.

11 In the last six months we have
12 seen claims done in as little as six weeks.
13 So, there were large retro-payments when we
14 were getting served in 12 to 14 months and
15 it's improved dramatically.

16 Generally we encourage them to
17 apply. There's only one thing you can do is
18 take action and apply. And learn something
19 useful and you still don't put it to use.

20 So set an appointment with the
21 Veteran Service Agency and we can help you
22 qualify for this benefit. Particularly,
23 there is no charge. In fact, it is against
24 the law for anyone to charge a veteran to do
25 veteran filing of benefits.

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 If there is an attorney needed
3 they would have to pay the attorney for
4 powers of attorney, health care proxy, and
5 so forth, but they can not charge to do the
6 VA benefit. And that's what we're there
7 for. We get paid by the county. Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Thank you.
9 Are there any questions from any of the
10 legislators?

11 MR. MANSFIELD: I just want to go
12 through some numbers and then you can ask
13 whatever questions you want.

14 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Sure. Just
15 to point out to the legislators, they were
16 kind enough to give us a handout and, if
17 there aren't enough copies, we'll certainly
18 make them available for whoever needs them.

19 MR. MANSFIELD: In New York
20 State, we have almost 900,000 veterans and
21 total VA expenditures in New York State is
22 currently over \$6 billion.

23 Compensation and pension, the
24 benefit I was just talking about, is
25 \$2,400,000,000 that is going into veterans'

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 checking accounts in New York State.

3 In Nassau County, which is where
4 we are and important to us, between 55 and
5 80,000 veterans, the VA expenditures are
6 \$254,422,000 that go into -- VA benefits go
7 into the veteran's checking accounts.
8 Doesn't go to any caregiver, goes directly
9 to the veteran and his family.

10 Compensation and pension for this
11 fiscal year was \$117,594,000, that was an
12 increase of over last fiscal year. Suffolk
13 County, of course, a bigger population, has
14 more dollars, and that's in your handout.

15 I want to focus a little bit on
16 what Nassau County has done since I tracked
17 this back to 2009, but, basically, from 2008
18 to 2009, compensation and pension went up \$9
19 million in volume in one year.

20 In 2010, we went down a million
21 four. In 2011, it went back up to almost \$4
22 million for the fiscal year.

23 And in 2012 it was \$2,350,000.
24 2013 we increased from that previous year,
25 \$16 million. In fiscal year 2014, which

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 just released those figures this month, we
3 went up \$20 million in compensation and
4 pension.

5 Now, understand, our agency
6 didn't do that \$20 million. We did about 60
7 percent of it. There are do it yourselves,
8 and there are other agencies that provide
9 this assistance to veterans. We know,
10 because we track our own numbers, we've done
11 about -- the previous year we did
12 approximately \$10 million out of our office
13 with only three counselors. That's federal
14 money, tax free.

15 The total VA expenditures, that's
16 a rolling number, \$254,422,000, that number
17 grows every year. There is a flyer in here
18 about the Aid and Attendance benefit I just
19 spoke about, and where we pull our
20 statistics from the VA.

21 Some other available information
22 about the VA on some of the graphs you will
23 see the veterans population is declining as
24 the World War II and Korean veterans expire.
25 But, with that, goes increased medical costs

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 which are now being put off to the clinics
3 and the VA hospital in Northport.

4 So, obviously, in the next 20
5 years we're probably going to lose all our
6 veterans from World War II, however, we may
7 still be seeing some of their spouses.

8 So, this information is
9 available, and if anybody needs additional
10 copies, we'll get them to you. If you have
11 any questions, we are here.

12 We just wanted to let you know
13 what we do and the amount of dollars that we
14 are serving and supporting the veteran
15 community.

16 We have established a trust among
17 the veteran community and reestablished our
18 reputation. We would like to continue to
19 have your support in doing that.

20 Bill is just going to speak a few
21 minutes about some automation in speeding up
22 procedures and getting claims filed more
23 promptly which we are starting to see now on
24 Aid and Attendance, and he's going to talk
25 about some of the service connected benefits

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 that we can now submit directly to the
3 regional office. Bill.

4 MR. BURNS: Thank you. One of
5 the things that Larry was actually very
6 humble about was that those numbers that
7 started coming out had to do with training
8 and things like that, and some of the things
9 that Larry has helped us, along with Ken, in
10 training and putting claims that have made
11 these processes happen that much faster for
12 people.

13 Mr. Esposito has probably told
14 you many times of how many times he's gotten
15 letters or phone calls saying thank you for
16 these things because they are pretty life
17 changing. One of the things that the VA has
18 come up with and we are pretty much on cue
19 with this along with IT is called a set
20 program, which we can actually send
21 documents directly to the VA electronically
22 which takes somewhere about three to four
23 months off the claims process, where things
24 can actually be done that quickly that we
25 weren't able to do before after things got

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 mailed, scanned and everything else. This
3 also takes a lot of time and pressure off
4 the veteran of trying to get medical
5 evidence and things like that because we can
6 now work directly with the VA and with their
7 providers and able to get documents to make
8 these things happen much quicker.

9 Mr. Eisenstein has worked very
10 well with us. He's been in our office
11 trying to help with us this. We've had
12 countless meetings now with Northport with
13 their executive staff there, and with the VA
14 executive staff in the regional office in
15 the city to make these things happen.

16 Where these things are going to
17 happen probably much quicker than we
18 thought, we are probably looking like six,
19 seven months before we're actually able to
20 get on ourselves, but that's -- we are still
21 ahead of the curve than a lot of the other
22 agencies throughout not only in New York
23 State but in the United States also. Thank
24 you.

25 MR. ROMMEL: Good afternoon. I

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 also wanted to mention that we have a
3 transportation department for veterans to
4 drive the veterans from the house to the
5 medical clinics, either Northport, Valley
6 Stream, the Vets Center in Hicksville and
7 also in Lynbrook. We conduct over 700
8 appointments a month. We have 13 vehicles
9 and we have four handicapped vehicles as
10 well.

11 The Veterans Service Agency,
12 besides doing transportation, pension, Aid
13 and Attendance, we do an array of other
14 services to veterans.

15 Another thing that I wanted to
16 add. We conduct two veteran stand downs.
17 These stand downs -- I took the term
18 homeless, I don't like that term, but
19 basically two stand downs for veterans who
20 are down and out. One is going to be this
21 summer, July the 14th, everyone is invited
22 at Hempstead, at the American Legion post.
23 We have about 200 to 300 veterans who come,
24 and we're talking from Iraq to Afghanistan,
25 young women with their kids, and an array of

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 veterans come to seek these services. So,
3 one in the summer and one in the winter.

4 Do you have anything else to add,
5 Mr. Esposito?

6 MR. ESPOSITO: Does anyone have
7 any questions for us?

8 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: In the first
9 place, I just wanted to say thank you. You
10 educated all of us.

11 Number two, Deidre and I were
12 just talking, you have a van that can go
13 around to different areas?

14 MR. ESPOSITO: Homes, yes.

15 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: Because
16 that's very important.

17 MR. ESPOSITO: We have two vans.
18 We just had one donated from American Legion
19 Post 1115. They just donated a van to us.
20 We had a ceremony in the park last Saturday.

21 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: But I'm
22 speaking about the education van that can go
23 around. I'm speaking as a legislator, if we
24 wanted to have two legislators who are next
25 to each other, as far as geographically, if

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 we can bring in your educational van and
3 announce in local papers that this would be
4 there for veterans to check on what their
5 rights may be, et cetera, do you have a way
6 for us to contact the person in charge of
7 that?

8 MR. ESPOSITO: Just call us.
9 Give us a call and we will be there. I
10 promise you. I want to thank the rest of
11 you. Thank you so much for listening to us.
12 Thank you for your hospitality. We really
13 appreciate it. Norma, every day is
14 Saturday.

15 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Before you
16 leave, I think some other legislators just
17 want to say something.

18 LEGISLATOR DUNNE: Just want to
19 tell you, keep up the good work, buddy.

20 MR. ESPOSITO: And it's all due
21 to your efforts helping us. I can't do this
22 alone. I got the greatest staff anybody can
23 have. I wouldn't give them up for the
24 world. I'm not kidding. People come to us.
25 I got letters. They're a great great staff.

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 They're the best. That's how a team should
3 work, together. Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: And Rose
5 Walker would like to speak if you don't
6 mind.

7 LEGISLATOR WALKER: And, Ralph, I
8 would like to thank you too, and certainly
9 all your team, and not only do you help all
10 the veterans that come to you, but you help
11 us tremendously. I can't tell you how many
12 times that I have reached out to you for
13 assistance or information in something and
14 you have certainly been extremely helpful.
15 I just thought how wonderful it was you
16 coming here today to do this presentation.

17 This morning I attended an event
18 over the Hicksville VFW with Congressman
19 Israel where we presented medals to a World
20 War II veteran who stormed the beach at
21 Normandy. It was 71 years ago was the date
22 it occurred. We presented him with all his
23 medals including his purple heart and Bronze
24 star. It was a very, very special day with
25 so many veterans who attended. It was kind

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 of a last minute spur of the moment that, I
3 found out about it, but it was a wonderful
4 day. And to see this gentleman who he and
5 his family who were so appreciative.

6 So, thank you for all you do
7 because I know that everything that you do
8 is so appreciated also.

9 MR. ESPOSITO: We do it from the
10 bottom of our hearts, believe me. Thank you
11 again.

12 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: I just
13 wanted to say thanks as well and to mention
14 I had the pleasure of going to the stand
15 down and it's really an amazing event. They
16 literally have hundreds of veterans lined up
17 on the street to come in the hall for
18 services. For something as simple as
19 providing free haircuts and clothing and
20 food, to having dozens of tables set up to
21 give the veterans advice on where to go to
22 get benefits, insurance, and really dozens
23 of different services. It's really amazing
24 to watch. And a lot of veterans come to
25 help run these events. It's funny to watch

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 them. They're still giving out the orders
3 and people still snap in line. It's a very
4 nice event to see your work hit the ground
5 and how hard you guys work and what a great
6 job you do. Thank you.

7 MR. MANSFIELD: It's veterans
8 helping veterans and we don't care which
9 side of the aisle. We're here. If it's
10 good for the veteran, do it. If it's not
11 good for the veteran, don't do it.

12 MR. ESPOSITO: Thank you again,
13 folks. Anybody else?

14 LEGISLATOR BIRNBAUM: I just
15 wanted to say, I had the pleasure of
16 visiting you at your office and seeing how
17 hard you all work and I know what you have
18 to put up with the parking restrictions and
19 the cramped space and I think you do a
20 fabulous job, and I hope you will be able to
21 expand a little bit more.

22 MR. ESPOSITO: So do we. Thank
23 you.

24 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: There is no
25 further business before this committee, may

Veterans & Sr. Affairs Committee/6-29-15

2 I have a motion to adjourn, please?

3 LEGISLATOR WALKER: So moved.

4 LEGISLATOR DUNNE: Second.

5 CHAIRMAN MACKENZIE: Moved by
6 Legislator Walker, seconded by Dennis Dunne.

7 All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

8 (Aye.)

9 We're adjourned. Thank you.

10 (Whereupon, the Veterans and
11 Senior Affairs Committee adjourned at 4:03
12 p.m.)

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, FRANK GRAY, a Shorthand Reporter and
Notary Public in and for the State of New
York, do hereby stated:

THAT I attended at the time and place
above mentioned and took stenographic record
of the proceedings in the above-entitled
matter;

THAT the foregoing transcript is a true
and accurate transcript of the same and the
whole thereof, according to the best of my
ability and belief.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
my hand this 13th day of July, 2015.

FRANK GRAY